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***Poverty and Future Rural Development in Africa: Perceptions, Pitfalls and Proposals*¹**

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INTRODUCTION.

To write briefly about a subject as complex, as varied and as patchily understood as "rural development in Africa" is to risk a combination of error, omission and banality, the whole rounded off with arrogance. Anything generally true is liable to be so vague as to be almost meaningless; and anything more specifically true of any one situation is liable to be so particular as to be ungeneralisable. And when "the future" is added, with all its imponderables, the difficulties are daunting indeed.

A further problem concerns the values of the writer. A paper about perspectives for the future may variously combine discussion of (i) what is happening, (ii) what will happen, (iii) what ought to be aimed for, and/or (iv) what ought to be done. While only the latter two overtly embody the observer's values, in practice the first two do as well, since what is perceived and what is predicted derive from acts of selection and judgement. Since, explicitly or implicitly, this paper considers all four, I should make clear my basic values, culture-bound as they are (like everyone else's). In any society there appear to me to be two clusters of ideals worth striving towards: an ideal of freedom, which includes freedom from constraints like sickness, hunger, fear and drudgery, as well as more positive freedoms to make choices and for people to live in ways which they themselves value (and not necessarily in ways which a government, a social science researcher, or a donor agency may think is good for them); and an ideal of equality which means that these freedoms should be for all, and distributed in a manner which is more rather than less equal. These two ideals overlap with and reinforce the current focus on the eradication

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of poverty and on the provision of basic needs for all rural people. In this paper the elimination of rural poverty is taken as the primary objective, and rural development means processes which contribute to that objective, especially through enhancing freedom and equality.

The paper has many limitations. It is based mainly on experience in anglophone Eastern Africa. It does not deal with important aspects of rural development such as international trade, the penetration of capital, fiscal policies, wage and pricing policies, rural-urban terms of trade, class formation, political organisation, or political differences between countries, important though all of these are. It claims only to make selective points and thrusts. For the sake of brevity its style is one of assertion, often without supporting evidence.

The paper considers problems of perceiving rural poverty, outlines some of the main trends in rural areas, describes common pitfalls in prescribing rural action, and finally outlines six thrusts for future action.

PERCEPTIONS AND TRENDS.

Before assessing trends, it is important to understand the present. A first question is whether there are systemic misperceptions of rural situations, and especially of rural poverty. I shall argue that there are, and that these give rise to misleading impressions of rural well-being.

In the first place, self-perpetuating myths derive from isolated projects. Ideologically Kenya and Tanzania are far apart but they share a tendency to generate myths of idealised rural institutions and well-being. In Kenya, the Mwea Irrigation Settlement has been much visited and much praised. Visitors during one-day tours have gained very favourable impressions which they have then recounted to others. Sheer repetition and mutual reinforcement have sustained a myth of relatively higher incomes and levels of welfare than have really existed (at least until the early years of this decade) or than has quite genuinely been believed to exist by the management of the Scheme (for the evidence see Moris 1973). In fact, despite its successes, the Scheme has been marked by seasonal malnutrition, sickness, heavy work for women, unsatisfactory housing, bad water supplies, high local costs for labour and firewood, and other disadvantages, and incomes have been much closer to those of dry-farming neighbours than had been supposed. In Tanzania, especially during the latter 1960s, a myth about ujamaa was generated partly through frequent visits and writing about three isolated initiatives — the Ruvuma Development Association, the Upper Kitete settlement, and Mbambara village — all of which practised collective production, with a sharing of proceeds. As a result it came to be believed, especially in the outside world, that such com-

munal production was widespread in Tanzania. It now seems that, apart from token communal fields, it was not. But selective visits to those three places and a steady flow of mutually reinforcing reports and articles allowed a quite contrary and very misleading impression to develop. In both Kenya and Tanzania, then, isolated projects have enabled observers to form much more favourable opinions about rural development and welfare than more general facts would ever have justified.

Second, geographical visibility biases perceptions towards those who are better off. For one part of Western Kenya, Joseph Ssenyonga has described what he calls an "elite roadside ecology" (1976:9). As services are provided along the roadside — improved tarmac surface for the road, bus services, electricity, telephone and water supply — so those who are better-off buy up roadside plots and build on them. The poorer people shift away out of sight. The visitor — whether from the capital city, the district headquarters, or even the location level — will tend to see the elite and their houses, and not see the poorer people and theirs. Again, in many cases the poorest rural areas are those which are most remote, most inaccessible, and least visited, whether by politicians or by civil servants. Yet again, the very poorest rural people are sometimes migrants — in Charles Elliott's phrase "the least enviable of men" (1975:129) — and not only politically unimportant and impotent, but physically difficult to find.

Third, the most disadvantaged rural people are often socially invisible, or at least unseen. They make less use than their neighbours do of health, educational, and other services. They come less to official meetings. They may not present themselves or their complaints to visiting officials. Officials themselves are locked into relationship with the rural elite. This is especially marked with agricultural extension, but can also apply to other arms of government. In one case in Kenya, junior government staff who surveyed random samples of 100 farmers each in the area where they worked were shocked at the poverty they encountered and which they had not realized existed. Women heads of rural households may be especially poor, especially vulnerable, and especially neglected by officials. The contacts of officials are heavily biased towards the more prosperous, articulate, and influential local people, with whom they share mutually sustaining class interests and perceptions.

Fourth, seasonality is a crucial but seriously neglected aspect of rural deprivation. Typically there is an annual crisis during the rains. It is the time when food is shortest, the poorer people are weakest, diseases are most rampant, and labour inputs are most critical for cultivation and weeding, determining future food supplies and cash income for those who rely on agriculture. This is the time of year

when children and lactating mothers especially suffer most. Yet it is also a time of year when officials and others in rural areas are least likely to notice, their attention being distracted by the agricultural activities which are taking place. It is also a time when rural travel is most difficult, and in some areas impossible. Thus much of the worst deprivation, which is seasonal, passes unseen.

A fifth factor is political. "Famine" is sometimes considered a shameful word. The case of the Ethiopian famine which contributed to the downfall of Haile Selassie is a famous example, but there have been similar if less dramatic examples elsewhere. Some governments and government officials play down the effects of food shortages, just as some voluntary agencies may at times exaggerate them. More generally, many of the poorest rural people are politically inarticulate and impotent. Rural refugees are a notable case. There are probably between one and two million rural refugees in Africa. Most of them are in remote border areas, without secure access to land, heavily dependent on the sale of their labour and on the purchase of food, and exceptionally vulnerable to sickness, malnutrition, and official harassment. Their presence depresses wages and drives up the cost of food. If they have money, they can often only exchange it at very unfavourable rates. They are, in fact, at the very bottom of the rural pile. Yet, apart from the actions of the UNHCR and the interventions of host governments and voluntary agencies, they are usually unrepresented, politically weak, and unable to communicate their needs. Sometimes, too, for political reasons, the host government does not want to acknowledge their presence. As with famine, so with refugees, there can be political reasons for turning a blind eye on severe rural deprivation.

Finally, until recently, social science research itself has tended to overlook the poorest rural people. There have been honourable exceptions, but the tendency has been to conduct studies in the more accessible and more prosperous areas, and to concentrate attention on larger rather than smaller farmers, and on farmers rather than the landless. Social scientists, especially when working for PhDs, prefer to study the studiable and the safe; and elites are more studiable and safer than are the poor. More recently, however, work such as that of Philip Mbithi and Carolyn Barnes (1975) on spontaneous and squatter settlement in Kenya, and of David Brokensha and E.H.N. Njeru (1977) and of Diana Hunt (forthcoming) in Mbere Division in Kenya, have opened up a new range of insights into the desperation and deprivation, often deepening as a result of "development", of some of the poorest rural people. And the disturbing and controversial account given by Colin Turnbull (1973) of the Ik, a people dying of starvation in Northern Uganda, has revealed a state of degradation which it is

difficult to grasp. Even for Turnbull, a social anthropologist living on the edge of a village, it was some time before he realized that people were dying. They were the older people, weaker than others, dying quietly in their huts. If such things are not seen by a resident social anthropologist, how much more must they be unseen by the passing visitor.

A further misperception is the failure to recognize the extent, speed and irreversibility of environmental degradation. Soil erosion was a colonial preoccupation which provoked measures of compulsion in unpopular programmes for terracing, blocking gulleys, stock limitation and the like. It is no matter for surprise that in Eastern Africa during the first decade of independence from colonial rule, soil erosion and stock limitation should have been non-subjects. But the cost of that decade of inaction will be heavy, and will be borne by future generations. Simultaneously, in much of savannah Africa, population has been forced out onto more and more marginal land, moving from densely populated more fertile highlands into less populated, more marginal lowlands. If Kenya is at all typical, widespread erosion appears permanently to have depleted the potential of large areas for future grazing and cultivation. In the words of H.S. Darling (1973:6) "The soil cover of the surface of any country is its greatest capital asset". Because of the agricultural base of many of their economies, this is more true for African countries, at least in the short and medium term, than it may be for much of the rest of the world. Yet for reasons which are a compound of reaction against repressive colonial measures, short-term political prudence, geographical inaccessibility, and low returns in conventional economic terms to capital investment in conservation measures in marginal areas, there have continued to be capital losses through "soil mining" and soil erosion which are probably irreversible short of geological time. These losses have gravely aggravated the problem of securing reasonable livelihoods for the poorer rural people in the longer term.

Failures to perceive the nature and extent of rural poverty, and the nature and extent of irreversible capital losses in the environment, make even more serious the implications of population growth. UN projections (United Nations 1974:64) for Africa as a whole have given an increase of 71 per cent in rural populations between 1975 and 2000 (from 305 million to 522 million). It may be noted that this estimate is predicated on a formidable increase of 225 per cent in urban populations (from 96 million to 312 million) over the same period, and that in some regions, notably Eastern Africa, the anticipated rate of increase of rural populations is considerably higher than the average of 71 per cent. It is difficult indeed to see how these future populations can be sustained at tolerable levels of living in many of the rural environments of Africa.

Finally, there are dynamic forces at work which tend to accentuate rural poverty, including the individualisation of land tenure (as in Kenya), population pressures forcing cultivation out onto more and more marginal land, large migrations of political and economic refugees, a brain and skill drain to urban areas, and the whole complex of factors which constitute the "urban bias" which Michael Lipton (1977) has described. Even without neo-Marxian analysis, it appears that development benefiting the poorer rural people in much of Africa may be not only more difficult than is often appreciated, but may be becoming increasingly difficult.

PITFALLS.

In trying to see a way forward there are many false trails and many pitfalls. Four of these are sufficiently common to deserve to be set in perspective.

(i) *Portmanteau panaceas.* — Writing and speech about rural development is larded with vague and emotive words, a conventional rhetoric, changing in its fashions but constant or deteriorating in its imprecision. Thus we have had modernisation, mobilisation and penetration exhibiting varying degrees of hardness, while decentralisation, coordination, integration and participation appear to have more staying power, and democratisation is the most recent to join their ranks. The point here is not that these words should be abandoned; it is, rather, that their use should not be allowed, as it often does, to substitute for concrete and practical thinking. Long sections of prose can be found, especially in UN documents, which combine words like these in a mush which slides smoothly over the polished tongue of the practised non-thinker. An illusion is created that something is being said. Sometimes superlatives are called in to emphasise non-statements. But it does not help to call for *maximum* coordination, to say that rural development must be *totally* integrated, to urge that there must be *full* participation by *all* the people, unless the detail is spelled out. The moral is that those who write and speak prescriptively about rural development should be challenged and forced to specify what they mean, in terms of who should do what when where and how, whenever they use such expressions. If they did so, it would be easier to see how often the poorer rural people were likely to be left out.

(ii) *Project-fixation.* — It is a commonplace that political leaders, civil servants, and donors tend to prefer identifiable photogenic projects to dispersed and less tangible programmes. This preference has benefits as well as costs, but the costs may be very high and becoming higher in terms of benefits foregone by the poorer rural people. Generalisation is precarious but the following may be true. The volume of capital aid

available for rural development in Africa has risen rapidly in the past two years. The numbers of donors active in any one country has increased. Bilateral donors are busily seeking poverty-oriented rural projects. The World Bank and the UN family are in the fray. The European Development Fund and the oil-producing Arab nations with their various funds (such as the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development) are extending their activities in Africa south of the Sahara, the Arab countries having promised \$1.5 billion for Africa. IFAD (the International Fund for Agricultural Development) is preparing to join in. But good poverty-oriented projects are scarce. Money is unspent. So donors combine to share projects, and seek projects which will enable them to spend more, and which therefore are liable to be more capital-intensive. The administrative demands on recipient countries multiply as they are bombarded by missions. Senior staff are harrassed by meetings and negotiations. Dependence may increase rather than decline as recipient countries struggle to fulfil what Dennis Rondinelli (1976) has appropriately called the "imperious rationality" of donors' demands for information and justifications. At the same time, there may be an ironical law that the more money has to be spent, and the less time there is to spend it in, the more the elites will benefit and the less the poorer will gain. Attention and administrative resources are diverted from wider programmes to narrower projects. The danger is that donor pressures and elite preferences will result in the reverse of the rhetoric which seeks to help the poorest. The moral is that donors should exercise restraint in their demands, that governments should resist tendencies for projects to distract attention and resources from programmes, and that both should treat administrative capacity as a scarce resource.

(iii) *Planning without implementation.* — The law of prior bias — that which comes first in a process gets most, and what comes last gets least — is illustrated by experiences with rural planning. Imperious rationality, in this case of central government staff and of academics, demands extensive information about a rural area before a plan for it can be drawn up. A repeated experience in East Africa has been the devotion of so much time and effort to data collection and processing that planning itself is delayed; and then that planning is so little related to what could realistically be achieved that the eventual document (a Five-Year Plan for District X, liberally decorated with the word "integrated") is a vague set of proposals unrelated to the budget process, unimplementable and unimplemented. Paradoxically, the more intelligent and well-informed the planners are, the more are the data demanded and the less are the chances of implementation. The moral is to start not with planning, but with improving implementation of what is already in hand, modifying it and making it more relevant to the objectives of reducing and eradicating poverty as a continuous

iterative process. It is sounder and easier at the local level to move from implementation to planning than from planning to implementation.

(iv) *Pessimism and paralysis.* — Social science research tends to generate pessimism which discourages and paralyses. In rural development, social scientists follow fashions. The latest fashion is usually the latest government initiative. In Eastern Africa, following changing government priorities, the fashions have successively favoured settlement schemes, cooperatives, rural planning and decentralisation. In each case attention has been concentrated on these initiatives in their early stages when most has been going wrong. The outcome (often a few years later) is a literature which gives the impression that there are serious inherent weaknesses in the approach; but the literature tends to appear at a time when many of the most important lessons have been learnt and the teething troubles overcome. By then, however, the social scientists have moved on to the next fashion. Trained to criticise, they excel in observing what is going wrong, and are weak in proposing how things should be done better. The danger here is that the trend of university education will be away from involvement and towards a critical negativism. It is sad that Colin Leys should end his analysis of underdevelopment in Kenya with the observation that

academic studies can contribute little to the effort to achieve new strategies of development grounded in the interests of the mass of those who are currently the victims of underdevelopment. Perhaps the most such studies can do is to try not to obscure the structure of exploitation and oppression which underdevelopment produces, and which in turn sustain it (1975: 275).

Academic studies in Africa have only relatively recently begun to focus on "the mass of those who are currently the victims of underdevelopment". It is early indeed to judge what effect those studies can and will have. But it is at least possible, and certainly to be hoped, that they will not only expose and communicate the situation of the poorer rural people, but will also contribute to strategies for improvement. The moral here in the context of rural poverty, as earlier with settlement schemes, cooperatives, rural planning and decentralisation, is that social scientists should not give up too soon and that they should pay much more attention to effective communication both to governments and to the international community.

PROPOSALS.

For the eradication of rural poverty the most crucial measures may often be related to land tenure, access to services, and marketing and pricing systems. To varying degrees, these depend upon the structure and operation of the political system in a country. It may be

important in some environments to point out repeatedly that growing landlessness associated with unequal distribution of land and changes in tenure may be generating much deprivation. But the purpose here is to propose measures of a different sort: measures which may be both appropriate and politically feasible in a wide range of countries, and which may contribute both towards the reduction of rural poverty and towards the creation of preconditions for its elimination. Six are put forward:

(i) *Social science research on rural poverty.* — Social science research should now focus more on the nature, structure and dynamics of rural poverty. Work such as that carried out in Kenya by Philip Mbithi and Carolyn Barnes (1975), David Brokensha and E.H.N. Njeru (1977), and Diana Hunt (forthcoming) should be repeated much more widely. Care should be taken to avoid the biases of the past towards studying conspicuous projects (*mea culpa*) to the neglect of less visible people. Possible measures are:

- the encouragement and sponsoring of student dissertations based on rural residence and research (as has already led to useful work in the Universities of Dar es Salaam and Nairobi)
- the involvement of university staff in action research in which they are participant observers
- more post-doctoral research based on rural residence. At the post-doctoral stage it should be easier to adopt the more innovative and risky approaches which will sometimes be needed
- extensive and heavy subsidies for publications concerned with rural poverty. It is absurd that so much money should be chasing so few poverty-oriented rural development projects and yet books and publications on rural poverty should remain inaccessible and often expensive, out of reach of many officials and academics
- far greater attention paid by researchers to the communication of their results to policy-makers, whether through articles in the press, workshops and seminars, or personal lobbying. The law of prior bias operates conspicuously with social science research to the grave neglect of efficient communication.

(ii) *International diffusion of technology.* — The diffusion of technology — both physical and organisational between countries in Africa and between Third World countries more generally is still very ineffective, and often mediated through the former metropolis or another richer country. Two examples of innovations with very considerable potential which have not been diffused can be cited from Botswana.

The first is the brigade movement in Botswana (see iv below). The second is a system of grazing management pioneered in Southern Africa by a Rhodesian ecologist, Alan Savory. The "Savory System" of short duration grazing has been quite widely adopted within white-dominated Southern Africa but is currently only practised outside on one site in Botswana, the Brigade Ranch at Serwe near Serowe. Under this system, the conventional wisdom about grazing control and stocking rates is stood on its head. Grazing is improved not by reducing stock numbers, but by increasing them. If the system is as good as is claimed, the cost of delays in examining its effectiveness and its applicability in other parts of Africa must be enormous. Yet for seven years it has been in operation in Botswana and has apparently not been adopted or tried out anywhere else in independent Africa.

A problem with both the brigades and with the Savory system is that they are not linked to any international organisation. In contrast, the organisational system for smallholder tea pioneered by the Kenya Tea Development Corporation was linked to the Commonwealth Development Corporation and the World Bank, and, having proved itself in Kenya, was then spread to Tanzania, Uganda, Malawi and Burundi.

For innovations which lack international linkages of this sort, solutions can be sought through the organisation of meets. The Commonwealth Secretariat has organised a meet at Arusha in Tanzania for the display of appropriate technology equipment from many countries. Other regional or Panafican organisations might follow suit. Countries might act as hosts to meets at which they would explain and demonstrate their own poverty-reducing innovations, whether physical or organisational, to other countries. There would be dangers of biases towards political pet projects, specially favoured areas, specially visible types of initiative, and presenting only the best, the proven, and the accepted. But if these could be guarded against to include, for example, approaches designed for the poor and the deprived (the formation of women's groups, providing land for the landless, rural employment projects, and the like), and also new and exciting ideas even if as yet unproven, the benefits might be considerable.

(iii) *Environment-specific future-oriented R and D.* — This proposal requires a radical departure from conventional thinking, and may in the longer term have more potential than most others for creating a better rural society. It involves examining the future relative resource endowments of specific rural environments and asking what technologies (which may not yet exist) would be desirable in order to knit those endowments together. The main resources can be taken as people, land, water and energy. The criteria for acceptable technologies will depend upon the observer. The writer's own list has five main

criteria — productivity of those resources which are relatively scarcer ; equity in access and distribution ; livelihood-intensity of techniques ; non-seasonality of food and income flows ; and stability in the environment. Instead of waiting for technologies to be developed (in which case they may well turn out to be inappropriate) this proposal requires deliberate intervention, internationally as well as nationally, to create technologies which can be specified but which do not yet exist.

This approach, if adopted with imaginative lateral thinking, should identify the comparative advantages of different environments and ways in which the much larger rural populations which can be anticipated might be provided with livelihoods. The technologies prescribed for future scenarios would vary considerably, but many might share the more efficient exploitation of sunlight as an energy source. Much of tropical Africa, especially the belts of tropical rain forest, has enormous, largely untapped sources of energy. At the same time, oil imports impose a heavy burden on the balance of payments of many countries and by raising transport costs contribute to low prices paid to food producers and high prices paid for food by urban consumers. Technologies — whether chemical, bio-chemical, or involving direct use of organic fuels for road locomotion — which exploit local renewable resources — could generate livelihoods (among those who collect leaves or wood and sell them, among those who work on energy farms, among those engaged on food production). But unless there is imaginative and well-informed intervention at an early stage, either technologies of this sort will not be developed, or if developed, will be unlikely to have an appropriate livelihood-intensity.

To pursue this proposal requires a series of inventive explorations, backed with resources to ensure that the necessary R and D is carried out. This might well involve rich country as well as African R and D. It might make good use of some of the poverty-oriented aid funds which at present are having such difficulty in finding suitable outlets.

(iv) *Alternative organisation.* — There has been a tendency for government bureaucracy, whether in regular departments or in various sorts of parastatals, to be regarded as the proper, even inevitable, means for achieving certain forms of rural development. Alternative organisations, especially Christian missions, have tended to be tolerated as colonial relics, but to be eased out of their positions of influence in the provision of services, especially rural education. There is, however, a case for alternative organisations for rural innovation and training. These can depart from the mission model, and may receive government subventions, while retaining their independence. The example of the Brigades in Botswana deserves to be carefully studied in other African countries. The Brigades have over the past decade experimented in many activities such as community education, more relevant syl-

labuses in secondary schools, school-leaver training in many different skills, the Savory system of short duration grazing, and the development of a new tool bar (the makgonatsothe) which promises to bring cultivation within reach of many more of the poorer and weaker rural people, and have contributed much to rural development in Botswana. They have combined an ethos of idealism and service with an openness to new ideas and a capacity to innovate which are difficult to achieve in government organisations. If Botswana's experience could be replicated, brigade-type alternative organisations might show elsewhere the same capacity to complement and supplement government action, for example in perceiving the nature and extent of rural poverty, in identifying and exploiting opportunities, in inventing techniques, in diffusing innovations, and in training.

(v) *Decentralisation*. — Like the other “-ations”, decentralisation is a word intermittently and often rather vaguely in vogue. Both as devolution of authority from the capital city, and as deconcentration of staff and resources from the capital to the regions, provinces, districts and subdistricts, its importance as a component in rural development would be difficult to exaggerate (for a recent presentation of the case, see Lele 1975). Urban bias in life styles, aspirations, careers, migration, and services militate continuously against rural development. Decentralisation is far from popular with civil servants and far from easy to carry out as has been shown by the varied experiences of Tanzania which did move staff out from Dar es Salaam, and Zambia which failed to move staff out of Lusaka. But priority for rural development is best achieved, as Chinese experience suggests, through putting staff and resources into the rural areas at the cost of the urban.

Ideally, decentralisation and the philosophy which underlies it should be pushed right down to the lowest levels. The best procedure may be to proceed by stages, for example through block grants to staff at provincial or regional level, and later through pushing such grants further down to districts and subdistricts, with increased devolution of responsibility and discretion at the same time.

(vi) *Reversals of demand*. — A process of central importance in diminishing rural poverty, and complementing decentralisation, can be described as reversing demand. At present, all too often, the main flows are orders and demands from the centre outwards to the periphery, from the top to the bottom of the hierarchy, from the government servant to the citizen, from the patron to the client, from the employer to the employee, from the “have” to the “have-not”. A reversal of these flows would mean that demands were flowing more powerfully upwards and inwards.

These reversals have many faces: the extension worker who listens to farmers instead of talking at them; the women's group that

demands that the health visitor come and instruct them ; the radio listening groups in Botswana which sent in their questions about the new land policy to ministers and then listened for their broadcast replies ; the agricultural workers' trade union that negotiates higher wages from plantations ; the landless who seize land as squatters and demand security on that land.

Some of these reversals will take place anyway. They become more likely as educational levels rise among rural people. Many other reversals can be promoted through special programmes for the formation of groups of the poorer people and for the encouragement of group awareness. Carefully designed and selected programmes in specialised fields may be able to serve as a focus. For example, programmes involving local communities in tackling malnutrition may concentrate the attention of government staff and of local leaders on many of those who are most deprived, and help to illuminate the nature and causes of malnutrition, providing a basis for more radical measures which will strike closer to the heart of the problems of rural poverty.

CONCLUSION.

Between these six thrusts there are complementarities. Greater understanding of rural situations and of rural poverty can be achieved through research ; innovations and inventiveness can be promoted through the international diffusion of techniques, through future-oriented R and D, and through alternative organisations; and responsiveness to the needs of the poorer people can at least be approached through progressive decentralisation and through programmes and measures designed to reverse the flow of demands. There are many objections to these proposals and their feasibility will vary by country and region. But if the argument of this paper is correct, the poorer rural people are often worse off and more vulnerable than is commonly perceived, and the environment in which many of them are living is often deteriorating. For many, conditions can be expected to get worse. For those who see weaknesses or omissions in these proposals the challenge is to put forward others which are complementary or which are more feasible, politically and administratively, and more appropriate for improving the lot of the poorer rural people in ways which they will welcome.

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